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Police Aid Unit Head Hits Critics

United Press International

Jerris Leonard, head of the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, yesterday lashed out at the press and critics of LEAA for what he said was a lopsided portrayal of the agency's failures.

Leonard told a House subcommittee that there was a danger in one-sided criticism because public officials might become disillusioned and "throw up their hands and say it just isn't possible to control crime."

Progress in development of a nationwide crime control program is being made, Leonard said, and "in many ways, American citizens are safer now than they were three years ago. A year from now, they will be safer than they are today."

Leonard said there is a need for better audit, fiscal and program controls at LEAA and that the basic overhauling of the agency is now completed.

He wondered whether some critism of LEAA stemmed from "an end-run attempt to discredit revenue sharing, since the LEAA block grant approach is its prototype."

But subcommittee Chairman John S. Monagan (D-Conn.) said, "I think you are confusing constructive effort with an effort to destroy the whole thing."

In his testimony, Leonard said, "The lopsided view of LEAA emerging from these hearings also is partly the responsibility of the press."

Leonard said that during hearings in July the press concentrated on criticisms and failed to report on splokesmen for Michigan and Illinois when they "testified on the excellence and achievements of the LEAA-supported programs in their states . . ."

Leonard told the subcommittee that LEAA would seek the return of about $240,000 in federal funds that had been granted to the state of Alabama.

As soon as an LEAA audit has been completed, an LEAA official — possibly Leonard — will present the audit to Gov. George Wallace and request that the state return any misspent funds.

LEAA, however, will not hold up an equivalent amount from Alabama's current federal allocation of anti-crime funds, it was learned.

Most of the funds LEAA wants back were used to finance police training scholarships, awarded primarily to sons of state officials. Another chunk of crime-fighting funds went to a quickly assembled advisory firm of television and newspaper officials. LEAA's audit has indicated the firm lacked expertise.